

CHAPTER 48

Al-Fath: The Victory

(REVEALED AT MADINAH: 4 *sections*; 29 *verses*)

This chapter is entitled *Al-Fath* or *The Victory*, a very appropriate name, because it deals with the conquests of Islâm, from the great moral victory gained at Hudaibiyah, mentioned in the opening verse, to the final triumph of Islâm over all other ways of life of the world in verse 28. The word *fath* itself occurs several times in this chapter. It is remarkable that although the Muslims had already been victorious in several battles, not one of those victories but a truce, apparently disadvantageous to the Muslims, is made the basis of the triumphant career of Islâm. There is an indication in this that the triumph of Islâm lay in its moral conquests, the first of these after the Flight being the apparent disadvantage, but the real moral conquest, gained at Hudaibiyah. This fact makes clear the connection of this chapter with the last, which speaks of the victory of Islâm in battles, this one drawing attention to its real triumph, which lay in moral conquests.

As regards the date of revelation, we have ‘Umar’s testimony on record that the Holy Prophet recited it for the first time when returning from Hudaibiyah (Bukhârî: 64:37). Hence its revelation belongs to the sixth year of the Hijrah.

The chapter opens by declaring the Hudaibiyah truce to be a real victory, and after referring to the disappointment of the hypocrites and the idolaters, concludes with a reference to the aid and allegiance which the faithful rendered to the Holy Prophet. The second section deals with the false excuses of the hypocrites, and separates them from the faithful by not allowing them to join the Muslims in their expeditions. The third section prophesies more victories in battles — that at Khaibar and the conquest of Makkah being clearly hinted at. The fourth section brings the chapter to a close by making the important announcement that Islâm will be made triumphant over all other religions of the world.

SECTION 1: Hudaibiyah Truce was a Victory

In the name of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

1 Surely We have granted you a clear victory,^a

2 That Allāh may cover for you your (alleged) shortcomings in the past and those to come,^a and complete His favour to you and guide you on a right path,^b

1a. The victory referred to is that gained by the truce at Hudaibiyah in 6 A.H. (Bukhârî 64:37). The fact that there was no actual fighting at Hudaibiyah has led many to think that the words contain a prophecy about the conquest of Makkah, which, however, is referred to later on in the third section of this chapter. The truce at Hudaibiyah was surely a real victory for the Muslims, because it opened the way for the propagation of Islam among the disbelievers, and by putting a stop to hostilities gave the opponents an occasion to ponder over the merits of the religion against which they had hitherto struggled in vain on the field of battle. As a result of this truce large numbers came over to Islām, and the words are thus prophetic, and their truth was demonstrated long after their revelation. It may be added here that ‘Umar had some misgivings as to the good of the truce concluded at Hudaibiyah; he thought that the truce was not honourable for the Muslims, for the conditions to which they yielded were disadvantageous to them. One of the conditions of the truce was that, if anyone from among the Makkans came over to the Holy Prophet, he would return him to the Quraish, though he were a Muslim, while the Quraish were not bound to return anyone who deserted the Prophet and joined the Quraish. The Muslims felt it very hard that one of their brethren should be returned to suffer persecution at the hands of the disbelievers; but, as the Quraish refused to make a truce unless this condition was included, the Holy Prophet accepted it. Immediately afterwards Divine revelation dispelled all those misgivings, and declared the truce to be a great victory leading to glorious results, as it actually proved to be.

2a. For *ghafr* meaning *covering* or *protecting*, see 2:286a. The word *dhanbi-ka* occurring here has been misunderstood as meaning *thy sin*. In the first place *dhanb* means any *shortcoming*, not necessarily a *sin*; see 3:11a. Secondly, the Prophet never committed a sin and his *istighfâr* meant the asking of Divine protection against the commission of sins; see 40:55a. Even before he was raised to the dignity of prophethood, he was known in Arabia as *al-Amîn* or the faithful one. *Dhanbi-ka* therefore here means not *the sin committed by thee* but *the sin committed against thee*, or *the shortcomings attributed to thee*, as *ithmî* in 5:29 means *not the sin committed by*

me but the sin committed against me, for which see 5:29a. Other examples of a similar use of *idâfah* are met with in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân. For instance, see 6:22, where *shurakâ'u-kum* does not mean *your partners* but *the partners set up by you*, and in 16:27 *shurakâ'î* does not mean *My partners* but *the partners which you set up with Me*. The *idâfah* in *dhanbi-ka* carries a similar significance, and the word means *thy alleged shortcomings*. It is only in this sense that we can speak of *sins in the past* and those *to come*. These were the shortcomings attributed to the Prophet by his enemies, by those who were contemporaneous with him and those who were yet to come after him. Notwithstanding the fact that the Prophet was respected throughout Arabia for his righteousness and truthfulness before he laid claim to prophethood, the twenty years of opposition to the Truth which he brought had poisoned the minds of the Arabs to such an extent that they now drew a very dark picture of him, heaping all kinds of abuses on him. Their poets now indulged in vituperating him, thus poisoning the minds of the masses. The battles that were now being fought had, further, made it impossible for the Muslims to present a true picture of Islam to the Arabs. After several years of conflict, the Hudaibiyah truce brought about a change in the relations of the two parties and the truth about the Prophet now began to dawn on their minds. They now saw that the Prophet was not the man of terror as their leaders had pictured to them. They saw the great transformation which he had wrought and the life which he had infused into a dead nation. It was in this sense that Allâh covered the shortcomings and failures which his opponents attributed to him. Their effect on the public mind was removed by the Hudaibiyah truce, which gave his enemies an occasion to ponder over the beauties of Islâm. In the words *those to come*, there is a reference to the latter-day carping of the enemies of Islâm. As already stated, this chapter deals not only with the immediate triumph of Islâm, but prophesies also its ultimate triumph in the whole world (verse 28). Hence there is a promise here that not only would those misunderstandings which already existed be corrected, but even those *that remained behind* and would be spread at a later date by the enemies of Islâm, would also be dispelled, and Islâm would thus shine in its full lustre not only in Arabia but in the whole world.

3 And that Allâh might help thee with a mighty help.^a

4 He it is Who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the believers that they might add faith to their faith. And Allâh's are the hosts of the *samâwât* and the earth, and Allâh is ever Knowing, Wise —

5 That He may cause the believing men and the believing women to enter Gardens wherein flow rivers to abide therein and remove from them their evil. And that is a grand achievement with Allâh,

6 And (that) He may chastise the hypocritical men and the hypocritical women, and the polytheistic men and the polytheistic women, the entertainers of evil thoughts about Allâh. On them is the evil turn, and Allâh is wroth with them and has cursed them and prepared hell for them; and evil is the resort.

2b. The *completion of favours* was accomplished by the spread of Islâm, and the *guiding on the right path* signified the right way to success.

3a. Large numbers becoming converts to Islâm proved a mighty help in its cause. While proceeding to Hudaibiyah the Holy Prophet was accompanied by 1,500 men; two years later, when advancing on Makkah, 10,000 men marched under his banner, which shows how fast Islam spread after the Hudaibiyah truce.

7 And Allâh's are the hosts of the *samâwât* and the earth; and Allâh is ever Mighty, Wise.

8 Surely We have sent you as a witness and as a bearer of good news and as a warner,

9 That you may believe in Allâh and His Messenger and may aid him and revere him. And (that) you may declare His glory, morning and evening.

10 Those who swear allegiance to you do but swear allegiance to Allâh. The hand of Allâh is above their hands. So whoever breaks (his faith), he breaks it only to his *nafs*' injury. And whoever fulfils his covenant with Allâh, He will grant him a mighty reward.^a

SECTION 2: The Defaulters

11 Those of the dwellers of the desert who lagged behind will say to you:^a Our property and our families kept us busy, so ask forgiveness for us. They say with their tongues what is not in their hearts. Say: Then who can control aught for you from

Allâh, if He intends to do you harm or if He intends to do you good. Nay, Allâh is ever Aware of what you do.

10a. The swearing of allegiance referred to here took place before the truce was concluded. The Holy Prophet had started with his men with the object of performing a pilgrimage, but when he reached Hudaibiyah, the Makkans opposed his entry into Makkah. Thereupon the companions of the Holy Prophet swore allegiance to him (under a tree as stated in verse 18), that they would defend him at all costs and die fighting at his side (Bukhârî 64:37). The necessity for this seems to have arisen from the fact that the Quraish advanced to fight the Muslims, who were unprepared for war. It may be noted here that the companions of the Holy Prophet swore allegiance to him twice at Makkah before the Flight — the swearers being in both cases the citizens of Madînah. Both these are known by the name of *Bai‘at al-‘Aqabah*. On the first occasion twelve men only were present, and the swearing of their allegiance implied only their belief in the truth of Islam, the promise given being: “We will not serve anyone but Allâh; we will not steal; we will not commit adultery; we will not kill our children; we will not slander, and we will not disobey the Prophet in anything that is right” (Bukhârî 2:10). The second pledge at ‘Aqabah, which came a year later, was given by seventy-three Madinites, including two women, who undertook to defend the Holy Prophet, “as we defend our own backs”. The third occasion on which an oath of allegiance was taken was the Hudaibiyah, and this is known as the *Bai‘at al-ridwân* (see verse 18). Women swore allegiance on one occasion, for which see 60:12a.

12 Nay, you thought that the Messenger and the believers would never return to their families,^a and that was made fair-seeming in your hearts, and you thought an evil thought, and you are a people doomed to perish.

13 And whoever believes not in Allâh and His Messenger — then surely We have prepared burning Fire for the disbelievers.

14 And Allâh’s is the kingdom of the *samâwât* and the earth. He forgives whom He pleases and chastises whom He pleases. And Allâh is ever Forgiving, Merciful.

15 Those who lagged behind will say, when you set forth to acquire gains: Allow us to follow you. They desire to change the word of Allâh. Say: You shall not follow us. Thus did Allâh say before.^a But they will say: Nay, you are jealous of us. Nay, they understand not but a little.

11a. The reference is to those who lagged behind in the Hudaibiyah expedition.

12a. Even as late as the sixth year of the Hijrah the Muslims were so weak, as compared with their enemies, that whenever they had to go into the field, the weak-hearted thought that the Muslims were going into the very jaws of death.

15a. The reference here is not to 9:83, which is a much later revelation. It appears that an order similar to that contained in 9:83 was given by the Holy Prophet to the laggards on the occasion of Hudaibiyah.

16 Say to those of the dwellers of the desert who lagged behind: You will soon be called against a people of mighty prowess to fight against them until they submit. Then if you obey, Allâh will grant you a good reward; but, if you turn back as you turned back before, He will chastise you with a painful chastisement.^a

17 There is no blame on the blind, nor is there blame on the lame, nor is there blame on the sick. And whoever obeys Allâh and His Messenger, He will cause him to enter Gardens wherein flow rivers. And whoever turns back, He will chastise him with a painful chastisement.

SECTION 3: More Victories for Islâm

18 Allah indeed was well pleased with the believers, when they swore allegiance to thee under the tree,^a and He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down tranquillity on them and rewarded them with a near victory,^b

16a. The power of the Makkan enemy was now broken, as was proved by the advance on Makkah two years later. Hence, the defaulters are told that they would be called on to join the forces of Islâm against another powerful enemy. This appears to be a reference to the wars against the Roman and Persian empires in the time of the early Caliphs, again referred to in verse 21.

18a. It should be noted that the 1,500 men who swore allegiance at Hudaibiyah are here declared to be those with whom Allah is well pleased. These words should set at rest the doubts of the adherents of a great schism in Islâm as to the sincerity of the companions of the Holy Prophet. The Prophet was sitting under a tree when allegiance was sworn to him at Hudaibiyah (Bukhârî 65: xlviii, 5).

18b. The near victory prophesied here was obtained at Khaibar, soon after the return from Hudaibiyah.

19 And many gains which they will acquire. And Allâh is ever Mighty, Wise.^a

20 Allâh promised you many gains which you will acquire, then He hastened this on for you, and held back the hands of men from you; and that it may be a sign for the believers and that He may guide you on a right path,^a

21 And others which you have not yet been able to achieve — Allâh has surely encompassed them. And Allâh is ever Powerful over all things.^a

22 And if those who disbelieve fight with you, they will certainly turn (their) backs, then they will find no protector nor helper.

23 (Such has been) the course of Allâh that has run before, and you will not find a change in Allâh's course.

24 And He it is Who held back their hands from you and your hands from them in the valley of Makkah after He had given you victory over them. And Allâh is ever Seer of what you do.^a

19a. These *many gains* predict the later conquests of the Muslims, beginning with the conquest of Makkah which made the Muslims masters of Arabia, and then extending to other countries, both in the East and the West.

20a. What was hastened on was the Hudaibiyah truce, which is called “a clear victory” in the very first verse of this chapter. By this truce *the hands of men* were *held back* from the Muslims, i.e., the Muslims were not persecuted any more. So persecution having ceased, people began to enter Islâm in large numbers. This was moreover an indication that the promised conquests of Islâm were not only conquests of countries but also conquests of hearts.

21a. This reference is to the great Muslim conquests under the successors of the Holy Prophet. The vanquishment of the enemy is plainly spoken of in the next verse.

24a. This is again a reference to the Hudaibiyah truce. Thrice already had the disbelievers attacked Madînah with very strong forces to crush Islâm, and the Muslims had repulsed them every time, inflicting severe loss on them. This is referred to in the words, *after He had given you victory over them*. Yet they offered terms which were humiliating to the Muslims and the Prophet accepted them to avoid bloodshed, so deeply did he

25 It is they who disbelieved and debarred you from the Sacred Mosque — and the offering withheld from reaching its goal. And were it not for the believing men and the believing women, whom, not having known, you might have trodden down and thus something hateful might have afflicted you on their account without knowledge — so that Allâh may admit to His mercy whom He pleases. Had they been apart, We would surely have chastised those who disbelieved from among them with a painful chastisement.^a

26 When those who disbelieved harboured disdain in their hearts, the disdain of Ignorance, but Allâh sent down His tranquillity on His Messenger and on the believers and made them keep the word of observance of duty, and they were entitled to it and worthy of it. And Allâh is ever Knower of all things.

love peace. Thus the hands of both sides were held back. Authentic reports state clearly that ‘Umar openly gave vent to his injured feelings (Bukhârî 54:15). The chief terms of the agreement were: (1) That the Muslims should return without performing a pilgrimage. (2) That they should be allowed to perform a pilgrimage next year, but should not stay for more than three days. (3) That if a disbeliever, being converted, went over to the Muslims, he should be returned, but if a Muslim went over to the disbelievers he should not be given back to the Muslims (Bukhârî 54:15). The last term of the agreement was specially dissatisfying to the Muslims; but it shows the strong conviction which the Holy Prophet had in the truth of Islâm, for he was confident that none of his companions would go over to disbelief and join the Quraish; and also that those who became converts to Islâm would not desert it on account of persecution. Thus it happened that the converts to Islâm from among the Makkans, not being allowed to settle at Madînah, formed an independent colony of their own (Bukhârî 54:15), proving thereby the genuineness of their convictions and the strength of their faith.

25a. One of the reasons given here for the truce is that the welfare of the Muslims demanded it, inasmuch as there were Muslims at Makkah who were unknown even to their brethren at Madînah, and that, if a battle had taken place, they would have suffered along with the enemy. This shows how Islâm was making silent progress at Makkah itself, even without the guidance of a preacher, and in spite of persecution.

SECTION 4: Ultimate Triumph of Islâm

27 Allâh indeed fulfilled the vision for His Messenger with truth. You shall certainly enter the Sacred Mosque, if Allâh please, in security, your heads shaved and hair cut short, not fearing. But He knows what you know not, so He has ordained a near victory before that.^a

28 He it is Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the *Dîn* of Truth that He may make it prevail over all religions. And Allâh is enough for a witness.^a

29 Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allâh, and those with him are firm of heart against the disbelievers,^a compassionate among themselves. You see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking Allâh's grace and pleasure. Their marks are on their faces in consequence of prostration. That is their description in the *Taurât* — and their description in the *Injîl* — like seed-produce that puts forth its sprout, then strengthens it, so it becomes stout and stands firmly on its stem, delighting the sowers that He may enrage the disbelievers on account of them. Allâh has promised such of them as believe and do good, forgiveness and a great reward.

27a. The Holy Prophet's journey to Makkah to perform a pilgrimage with 1,500 of his companions was undertaken on the basis of the vision stated here. In a vision, the Prophet had seen himself and his companions performing a pilgrimage. Convinced of the truth of his vision, he set out with about 1,500 of his companions with the object of performing a pilgrimage. The Makkans, however, opposed him at Hudaibiyah, and a truce was there arranged, according to which the Holy Prophet had to return without performing a pilgrimage. The truth of the vision is therefore asserted here. It is made clear that the Prophet's return did not falsify the vision, which had to be, and was, fulfilled next year. This was the answer which the Holy Prophet gave to 'Umar when he objected to returning without performing a pilgrimage (Bukḥârî 54:15). The *near victory* referred to here as coming *before that*, i.e., before the vision was fulfilled by the actual performance of the pilgrimage during the following year, is the conquest of Khaibar which happened in the month of "afar in the seventh year of the Hijrah.

28a. This prophecy of the prevalence of Islâm over all other ways of life is a prophecy which extends into the distant future, while Arabia saw its fulfilment in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet. The prevalence of Islâm does not, however, mean the political supremacy of its adherents at all times, nor does the prophecy signify that other

religions would at any time entirely disappear. It only indicates that the superiority of the religion of Islâm over all other religions will at last be established, and Islâm will be the way of life as prescribed by Allâh of the majority of the nations of the earth. No other scripture prophesies the triumph of the religion it preaches in such unmistakable terms. See also 9:33; 61:9.

29a. *Ashiddâ'* is plural of *shadîd*, which means *firm, strong, powerful*, as well as *brave, firm of heart* (*Lisân al-‘Arab* (Dictionary), by ‘Allâmah Abu-l-Faḍl Jamâl al-Dîn Muḥammad ibn Mukarram; *Al-Qâmûs al-Muḥîṭ* (Dictionary), by *Shaiḥ* Majd al-Dîn Muḥammad ibn Ya‘qûb Al-Firozâbâdî; and the *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). *Shiddat*, the root word, also signifies *firmness of heart* (*Tâj al-‘Arûs* (Dictionary), by *Imâm Muḥibb al-Dîn Abu-l-Faïd Murtaḍâ*). The translation *fierce*, or *vehement*, adopted in English translations, is not correct here. The Muslims stood firm against the disbelievers but they were never fierce or hard in their treatment towards them.